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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NDJAMENA 000864

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SUBJECT: CHAD: THE ROAD AHEAD

Classified By: Ambassador Marc Wall for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: President Deby's victories this spring provide him an opening for reaching out to his opponents. While their starting positions appear unbridgeable, and neither side has manifested the political will for compromise, at least Deby is making gestures in the right direction and his opponents are mulling over counter-proposals. We should work with the French and other international partners to encourage any initiative that can help advance a program of reconciliation and reform. END SUMMARY

Deby's Victories

¶2. (SBU) During a few brief weeks earlier this spring, President Idriss Deby Itno scored a string of victories against his opponents. On April 13, he beat back an assault by a column of armed rebels at the gates of N'Djamena. On April 26, he reached a compromise agreement with the World Bank on releasing oil royalties from the blocked escrow account. On May 3, he held an election that, though badly flawed, gives him the cover to claim a mandate for another five years in power. And on May 5, he received word of the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement in Abuja and proposals for a UN force that will help secure his volatile eastern border with Sudan. Thus, in contests against the armed rebels, the World Bank, his political opposition, and Khartoum that threatened to undo his regime, he came out on top in them all.

¶3. (SBU) His triumph may be short-lived. Skirmishes on Chad's eastern and southern borders continue, and a major rebel offensive before the onset of the rainy season in coming weeks cannot be ruled out. Agreement still has not been reached with the IMF and World Bank on the revised 2006 budget, a precondition for the release of the blocked funds. The May 3 election did nothing to restore confidence of Chadians in their political process. And at least from the Chadian perspective, a durable peace backed by a robust international force in Darfur remains a distant hope.

14. (SBU) Still, for the moment at least, Deby can look forward to five more years in power with more confidence than he has been able to for some time. He has won what he wants most: control of the military, immunity from prosecution, and access to oil revenues (to include the windfall of as much as USD 2 billion in tax payments next year). He also has the assurance that, thanks to the revisions in the constitution lifting term limits, he will never have to worry about legal restrictions forcing him to step down.

Prospects for Reconciliation

15. (C) Deby's victory gives him the opportunity to reach out to his opponents. Little in his past suggests that he has the willingness or capability to do so. Deby is a fierce desert fighter, but a divisive political leader. He has little stomach for managing coalitions, nurturing consensus, or engaging in the give and take of normal democratic politics. Instead, he rules by intimidating, buying off, and, when necessary, exiling or even killing off his opponents. He surrounds himself with sycophants and regards dissenters with suspicion, if not outright hostility. He puts up with criticism in the press and the National Assembly, but only because he knows it does not threaten his power. Even though many in his extended family have turned on him, he has not succeeded in reaching out beyond his immediate clan to establish a broader base of support. Despite his best efforts in the recent presidential election campaign, he failed completely at firing popular enthusiasm

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for his rule.

16. (SBU) Deby is nonetheless making gestures to respond to calls for initiating political dialogue. He has instructed his Prime Minister to organize a gathering with the opposition political parties. He has also asked a committee of wise men for its recommendations, even though its chairperson, former President Malloum, has no expectation that any significant progress is possible. Deby is hearing out -- and at least not rejecting outright -- French ideas for forming a new government under an opposition prime minister and for holding real elections for the National Assembly next year.

17. (SBU) From long and bitter experience in dealing with Deby in the past, the opposition leaders are understandably leery about his overtures. In their view, now that Deby can claim a mandate for another term, any concessions he appears to make are only for show, and they will have no part of it. They have nevertheless moved beyond their position of insisting on a postponement of the May 3 presidential election as a precondition for talking with Deby, even if their new proposals are non-starters (as far as Deby is concerned). They talk now of a "non-exclusive dialogue" to include the armed rebel movements and a broadly representative council that would take over presidential powers for running the government and implementing a "road map."

A Way Forward

18. (C) The weeks leading up to Deby's inauguration on August 8 offer the best chance we and other international partners have had to influence Chad in a positive direction since the initial sparring took place in early 2004 on Deby's plans to overturn term limits and seek a third term. That opportunity was missed then. Even now the positions staked out by Deby and his opponents appear irreconcilable. The positive voices they have been making recently appear designed more to play to the international audience, than to

signal any serious willingness to compromise.

¶9. (C) But even if the political will necessary for progress is hardly evident now, it is still worth the effort. Implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement will ease pressures on Chad, but it will not solve its problems. Durable peace can begin to take root only if Deby and his opponents can reach a political consensus on Chad's future. Even launching a process seeking to achieve that consensus could help tame the cross-currents threatening the country's stability.

¶10. (C) We doubt that elaborating a detailed "road map" with specific benchmarks and commitments would be useful at this early stage. Our role is better directed at discretely supporting French efforts to persuade Deby to appoint an opposition cabinet and hold real legislative elections. We should be ready to use our influence with the opposition leaders to encourage them to explore any serious initiatives in this direction. Although they will have to accept Deby's sham election of May 3 and his mandate for another five years, a political opening now can at least set the stage for more credible presidential elections the next time around.

¶11. (C) For any plan to make a difference, we will need to devote more than just token resources in support of international efforts to assist Chad with political and economic reform. This would involve working not only to fix the electoral process, but also to strengthen political parties, empower the legislative branch, and overhaul public finance management. If progress on these fronts is made, we should also be ready to invite Deby to Washington. He has won his most recent round of fights, but he knows he still

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lacks what he most wants from us: our respect. We should use that concern to reward him if he chooses to engage in a serious program of reconciliation and reform.

¶12. (U) MINIMIZE CONSIDERED
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